

**CLAIMS**

1. A method comprising:

receiving a request for one or more catalog items from a requestor;

formatting the request according to a catalog interface protocol;

sending the formatted request to a plurality of catalog servers;

receiving a response from each of the plurality of catalog servers in a format conforming to the catalog interface protocol, each of the responses including results describing one or more catalog items identified in response to the request;

parsing the responses to obtain the results; and

sending the results from the plurality of catalog servers to the requestor.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising displaying the results in a single display screen.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the catalog interface protocol comprises the Open Catalog Interface (OCI) protocol.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein said receiving the request comprises receiving a text string.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the request includes one or more query items, and wherein formatting the request comprises generating a plurality of formatted requests, each formatted request including a URL for one of the plurality of catalog servers and the one or more query terms in one or more fields according to the catalog interface protocol.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the request includes data identifying attributes of catalog items in a plurality of fields.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein sending the formatted request comprises connecting to a catalog server including a catalog database.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein said receiving the plurality of responses comprises receiving a plurality of HTML pages.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein said receiving the plurality of responses comprises receiving a plurality of XML pages.

10. The method of claim 1, further comprising, at one of the catalog servers:

parsing the formatted request according to the catalog interface protocol;

generating the response describing one or more catalog items identified in response to the request; and  
returning the response.

11. The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
determining a plurality of catalog servers available to the requestor.

12. The method of claim 10, wherein said determining comprises determining proxy settings of a browser used by the requestor.

13. An article including a machine-readable medium including machine-executable instructions operative to cause a machine to perform the steps of:

receiving a request for one or more catalog items from a requestor;

formatting the request according to a catalog interface protocol;

sending the formatted request to a plurality of catalog servers;

receiving a response from each of the plurality of catalog servers in a format conforming to the catalog interface protocol, each of the responses including results describing one or more catalog items identified in response to the request;

parsing the responses to obtain the results; and sending the results from the plurality of catalog servers to the requestor.

14. The article of claim 13, further comprising instructions operative to cause the machine to display the results in a single display screen.

15. The article of claim 13, wherein the catalog interface protocol comprises the Open Catalog Interface (OCI) protocol.

16. The article of claim 13, wherein said receiving the request comprises receiving a text string.

17. The article of claim 13, wherein the request includes one or more query items, and wherein formatting the request comprises generating a plurality of formatted requests, each formatted request including a URL for one of the plurality of catalog servers and the one or more query terms in one or more fields according to the catalog interface protocol.

18. The article of claim 13, wherein the request includes data identifying attributes of catalog items in a plurality of fields.

19. The article of claim 13, wherein sending the formatted request comprises connecting to a catalog server including a catalog database.

20. The article of claim 13, wherein said receiving the plurality of responses comprises receiving a plurality of HTML pages.

21. The article of claim 13, wherein said receiving the plurality of responses comprises receiving a plurality of XML pages.

22. The article of claim 13, further comprising instructions operative to cause the machine to:

determine a plurality of catalog servers available to the requestor.

23. The article of claim 22, wherein said determining comprises determining proxy settings of a browser used by the requestor.

24. A system comprising:

a client operative to enable a user to compose and send request for one or more catalog items; and

a catalog search agent operative to:

receive the request from the requestor,

format the request according to a catalog

interface protocol,

send the formatted request to a plurality of

catalog servers,

receive a response from each of the plurality of

catalog servers in a format conforming to the catalog

interface protocol, each of the responses including results describing one or more catalog items identified in response to the request, parse the responses to obtain the results, and send the results from the plurality of catalog servers to the requestor.

25. The system of claim 24, wherein the client includes a browser operative to communicate with the catalog search agent over a Web portal.

26. The system of claim 24, wherein the catalog search agent is further operative to display the results in a single display screen.

27. The system of claim 24, wherein the catalog interface protocol comprises the Open Catalog Interface (OCI) protocol.

28. The system of claim 24, wherein said receiving the request comprises receiving a text string.

29. The system of claim 24, wherein the request includes one or more query items, and

wherein formatting the request comprises generating a plurality of formatted requests, each formatted request including a URL for one of the plurality of catalog servers and the one or more query terms in one or more fields according to the catalog interface protocol.

30. The system of claim 24, wherein the request includes data identifying attributes of catalog items in a plurality of fields.

31. The system of claim 24, wherein sending the formatted request comprises connecting to a catalog server including a catalog database.

32. The system of claim 24, wherein said receiving the plurality of responses comprises receiving a plurality of HTML pages.

33. The system of claim 24, wherein said receiving the plurality of responses comprises receiving a plurality of XML pages.

34. The system of claim 24, wherein the catalog search agent is further operative to determine a plurality of catalog servers available to the requestor.

35. The system of claim 34, wherein said determining comprises determining proxy settings of a browser used by the requestor.